

Standards for education and training

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Part 3:

# **Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes**

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# Contents

About our standards	3
Introduction	4
The four fields of nursing practice	6
The student journey	8
1 Selection, admission and progression	9
2 Curriculum	11
3 Practice learning	13
4 Supervision and assessment	14
5 Qualification to be awarded	15
Glossary	16

These updated standards were approved by Council at their meeting on 25 January 2023.

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# About our standards

Our standards for education and training include the Standards framework for nursing<sup>1</sup> and midwifery education, Standards for student supervision and assessment, and programme standards specific to each approved programme.

Our [standards](#) for education and training are set out in three parts:

[Part 1: Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)

[Part 2: Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)

Part 3: Programme standards:

- [Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration midwifery programmes](#)
- [Standards for pre-registration nursing associate programmes](#)
- [Standards for prescribing programmes](#)
- [Standards for post-registration programmes: programmes leading to specialist community public health nurse qualifications and programmes leading to community nursing specialist practice qualifications](#)
- [Standards for return to practice programmes](#)

Supporting information for our [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#), and our [Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes](#), can be found on our [website](#).

These standards help nursing and midwifery [students](#) achieve NMC proficiencies and programme outcomes. All nursing and midwifery professionals must practise in line with the requirements of [the Code](#), the professional standards of practice, values and behaviours that nurses, midwives and nursing associates are expected to uphold.

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<sup>1</sup> We have used the phrase 'nursing' in this document to apply to the work of nurses and nursing associates. Nursing associates are a distinct profession in England with their own part of our register, but they are part of the nursing team.

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# Introduction

Our Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes set out the legal requirements, entry requirements, availability of [recognition of prior learning](#), length of programme, requirements for supervision and assessment and information on the award for all pre-registration nursing education programmes.

Student nurses must successfully complete an NMC approved pre-registration programme to meet the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and be eligible to apply for entry to the NMC register.

Public safety is central to our standards. Students will be in contact with [people](#) throughout their education and it's important that they learn in a safe and effective way.

These programme standards should be read with the NMC's [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#) and [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#), both of which apply to all NMC approved programmes. NMC [Approved Education Institutions \(AEIs\)](#) intending to deliver pre-registration nursing programmes must comply with all these standards to run an approved programme.

Education providers structure their educational programmes to comply with our programme standards. They also design their curricula around the published proficiencies for a particular programme and students are assessed against these proficiencies to make sure they are capable of providing safe, effective and kind care that improves health and wellbeing.

Proficiencies are the knowledge, skills and behaviours that nurses, midwives and nursing associates need in order to practise. We publish standards of proficiency for the nursing and midwifery professions as well as proficiencies for NMC approved post-registration qualifications.

Our standards for education and training highlight the need for programmes to adopt an inclusive approach to recruitment, selection and progression, ensuring admissions and all other academic processes are open, fair, transparent and demonstrate an understanding of and take measures to address underrepresentation.

Through our [quality assurance](#) processes we check that education programmes meet all of our standards regarding the structure and delivery of educational programmes, that the programme outcomes relate to the expected proficiencies for particular qualifications and that AEs and [practice learning partners](#) are managing risks effectively. Using internal and external intelligence we monitor risks to quality in education and training, this intelligence gathering includes analysis of system regulator reports.

Before any programme can be run, we make sure it meets our standards. We do this through an approvals process, in accordance with our [quality assurance framework](#).

Overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the quality of any educational programme lies with an AEI in partnership with practice learning partners.

### **Legislative framework**

Article 15(1) of the [Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001](#) ('[the Order](#)')<sup>2</sup> requires the Council to establish standards for education and training which are necessary to achieve the standards of proficiency for admission to the register, as required by Article 5(2) of the Order. The [Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes](#) are established under the provision of Article 15(1) of the Order.

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# Four fields of nursing practice

In accordance with the Nurses & Midwives (Part and Entries in the Register) Order of Council 2004 (SI 2004/1765), which states that entries in the register are to include a registrant's field of practice, UK students that qualify in a specific field of practice as a level 1 nurse may apply to enter the NMC register as a nurse in one or more of the four fields of nursing practice: adult, children, learning disabilities and mental health.

AEIs and their practice learning partners have ownership and accountability for the development, delivery and management of pre-registration nursing programme curricula. Pre-registration nursing programmes may offer various routes to registration, however, all programmes leading to registration must include routes within the programme specific to the relevant fields of nursing practice for which approval is being sought.

The [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#) and these programme requirements give AEIs in partnership with practice partners the flexibility to design their own curriculum and the autonomy to decide on the proportion of generic and field specific hours provided. In designing curricula for dual award (that is, a programme of study that leads to registration in two fields of nursing practice) the NMC expects the AEI to design and deliver a programme of suitable length that ensures the student is proficient in delivering safe and effective care in both fields of nursing.

Programme curricula must cover the outcomes set out in platforms 1-7 of [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and the communication and relationship management skills and nursing procedures set out in the Annexes to that document. All nursing students across all fields of nursing must have the necessary learning supervision and assessment in preparation for professional practice as a registered nurse.

We believe that involving people who use services and members of the public in the planning and delivery of curricula will promote public confidence in the education of future nurses. We expect the use of supportive evidence and engagement from people who have experienced care by adult, children's, learning disabilities or mental health nurses to inform programme design and delivery for all fields of nursing practice.

Nursing students will learn and be assessed in theory, [simulation](#) and practice environments and settings. AEs and practice placement partners must ensure that students meet the proficiencies relevant to their anticipated field(s) of nursing practice by the end of the programme. On successful completion of a programme students will be registered by the NMC as qualifying in one or more field of nursing practice.

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# The student journey

Standards for pre-registration nursing programmes follow the student journey and are grouped under the following five headings:

## **1. Selection, admission and progression**

Standards about an applicant's suitability and continued participation in a pre-registration nursing programme

## **2. Curriculum**

Standards for the content, delivery and evaluation of the pre-registration nursing programme

## **3. Practice learning**

Standards specific to pre-registration learning for nurses that takes place in practice settings

## **4. Supervision and assessment**

Standards for safe and effective supervision and assessment for pre-registration nursing programmes

## **5. Qualification to be awarded**

Standards which state the award and information for the NMC register.



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# 1 Selection, admission and progression

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 1.1** Confirm on entry to the programme that [students](#):
  - 1.1.1** meet the entry criteria for the programme as set out by the AEI and are suitable for their intended field of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
  - 1.1.2** demonstrate values in accordance with [the Code](#)
  - 1.1.3** have capability to learn behaviours in accordance with [the Code](#)
  - 1.1.4** have capability to develop numeracy skills required to meet programme outcomes
  - 1.1.5** can demonstrate proficiency in English language
  - 1.1.6** have capability in literacy to meet programme outcomes
  - 1.1.7** have capability for digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes.
- 1.2** ensure students' [health and character](#) are sufficient to enable safe and effective practice on entering the programme, throughout the programme and when submitting the supporting declaration of health and character in line with the NMC's health and character decision-making guidance<sup>3</sup>. This includes satisfactory occupational health assessment and criminal record checks
- 1.3** ensure students are fully informed of the requirement to declare immediately any police charges, cautions, convictions or conditional discharges, or determinations that their fitness to practise is impaired made by other regulators, professional bodies and educational establishments, and ensure that any declarations are dealt with promptly, fairly and lawfully

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**3** [Guidance on health and character](#)

- 1.4 ensure the registered nurse responsible for directing the educational programme or their designated registered nurse substitute is able to provide supporting declarations of health and character for students who have completed a pre-registration nursing programme<sup>4</sup>
- 1.5 permit recognition of prior learning that is capable of being mapped to the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and programme outcomes, up to a maximum of 50 percent of the programme
- 1.6 for NMC registered nurses permit recognition of prior learning that is capable of being mapped to the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and programme outcomes that may be more than 50 percent of the programme, and
- 1.7 support students throughout the programme in continuously developing their abilities in numeracy, literacy and digital and technological literacy to meet programme outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> Rule 6(1)(a)(i) of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (Education, Registration and Registration Appeals) Rules 2004 (SI 2004/1767).

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## 2 Curriculum

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 2.1** ensure that programmes comply with the NMC [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)
- 2.2** comply with the NMC [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)
- 2.3** ensure that programme learning outcomes reflect the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and each of the four fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 2.4** design and deliver a programme that supports students and provides exposure across all four fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 2.5** state routes within their pre-registration nursing programme that allows students to enter the register in one or more of the specific fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities or children's nursing
- 2.6** set out the general and professional content necessary to meet the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and programme outcomes
- 2.7** set out the content necessary to meet the programme outcomes for each field of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 2.8** ensure that field-specific content in relation to the law, safeguarding, consent, pharmacology and medicines administration and optimisation is included for entry to the register in one or more fields of nursing practice
- 2.9** ensure the curriculum provides an equal balance of 50 percent theory and 50 percent practice learning using a range of learning and teaching strategies

- 2.10** ensure technology and simulation opportunities are used effectively and proportionately across the curriculum to support supervision, learning and assessment
- 2.11** ensure that programmes delivered in Wales comply with legislation which supports use of the Welsh language
- 2.12** ensure that all pre-registration nursing programmes meet the equivalent of minimum length of three (academic) years for full time programmes, which consist of a minimum of 4,600 hours
- 2.13** ensure programmes leading to registration in two fields of nursing practice are of suitable length to ensure proficiency in both fields of nursing, and
- 2.14** ensure programmes leading to nursing registration and registration in another profession are of suitable length and nursing proficiencies and outcomes are achieved in a nursing context.

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# 3 Practice learning

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 3.1** provide practice learning opportunities that allow students to develop and meet the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) to deliver safe and effective care to a diverse range of people across the four fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 3.2** ensure that students experience the variety of practice expected of registered nurses to meet the holistic needs of people of all ages
- 3.3** provide practice learning opportunities that allow students to meet the communication and relationship management skills and nursing procedures, as set out in [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#), within their selected fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 3.4** provide no less than 2300 practice learning hours, of which a maximum of 600 hours can be in simulated practice learning
- 3.5** take account of students' individual needs and personal circumstances when allocating their practice learning including making [reasonable adjustments](#) for students with disabilities
- 3.6** ensure students experience the range of hours expected of registered nurses, and
- 3.7** ensure that students are [supernumerary](#).

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# 4 Supervision and assessment

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 4.1 ensure that support, supervision, learning and assessment provided complies with the NMC [Standards framework for nursing and midwifery education](#)
- 4.2 ensure that support, supervision, learning and assessment provided complies with the NMC [Standards for student supervision and assessment](#)
- 4.3 ensure they inform the NMC of the name of the registered nurse responsible for directing the education programme
- 4.4 provide students with constructive feedback throughout the programme to support their development
- 4.5 ensure throughout the programme that students meet the [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#) and programme outcomes for their fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 4.6 ensure that all programmes include a health numeracy assessment related to nursing proficiencies and calculation of medicines which must be passed with a score of 100 percent
- 4.7 ensure that students meet all communication and relationship management skills and nursing procedures within their fields of nursing practice: adult, mental health, learning disabilities and children's nursing
- 4.8 assess students to confirm proficiency in preparation for professional practice as a registered nurse
- 4.9 ensure that there is equal weighting in the assessment of theory and practice, and
- 4.10 ensure that all proficiencies are recorded in an ongoing record of achievement which must demonstrate the achievement of proficiencies and skills set out in [Standards of proficiency for registered nurses](#).

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# 5 Qualification to be awarded

Approved education institutions, together with practice learning partners, must:

- 5.1** ensure that the minimum award for a pre-registration nursing programme is a bachelor's degree, and
- 5.2** notify students during and before completion of the programme that they have five years<sup>5</sup> to register their award with the NMC. In the event of a student failing to register their qualification within five years they will have to undertake additional education and training or gain such experience as specified in our standards.

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<sup>5</sup> [Standards and guidance on the requirements for those who first apply for registration more than five years after being awarded an approved qualification](#)

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# Glossary

**Approved Education Institutions (AEIs):** the status awarded by the NMC to an institution, or part of an institution, or combination of institutions that works in partnership with practice placement and work placed learning providers. AEIs will have provided us with assurance that they are accountable and capable of delivering NMC approved education programmes.

**Educators:** in the context of the NMC standards for education and training educators are those who deliver, support, supervise and assess theory, practice and/or work placed learning.

**Equalities and human rights legislation:** prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and other characteristics. Anti-discrimination laws can be country specific and there are some legally binding international protections.

**Health and character requirements:** as stipulated in NMC legislation (Articles 9(2)(b) and 5(2)(b) of the Nursing and Midwifery Order 2001) 'good health' means that the applicant is capable of safe and effective practice either with or without reasonable adjustments. It does not mean the absence of a health condition or disability. Each applicant seeking admission to the register or to renew registration, whether or not they have been registered before, is required to declare any pending charges, convictions, police cautions and determinations made by other regulatory bodies.

**People:** individuals or groups who receive services from nurses and midwives, healthy and sick people, parents, children, families, carers, representatives, also including educators and students and others within and outside the learning environment.

**Practice learning partners:** organisations that provide practice learning necessary for supporting pre-registration and post-registration students in meeting proficiencies and programme outcomes.



**Quality assurance:** NMC processes for making sure all AEs and their approved education programmes comply with our standards.

**Reasonable adjustments:** where a student requires reasonable adjustment related to a disability or adjustment relating to any protected characteristics as set out in **equalities and human rights legislation**.

**Recognition of prior learning:** a process that enables previous certificated or experiential learning to be recognised and accepted as meeting some programme outcomes, this means it includes both theory and practice achievement.

**Simulation:** an educational method which uses a variety of modalities to support students in developing their knowledge, behaviours and skills, with the opportunity for repetition, feedback, evaluation and reflection to achieve their programme outcomes and be confirmed as capable of safe and effective practice.

**Stakeholders:** any person, group or organisation that has an interest or concern in the situation in question, and may affect or be affected by its actions, objectives or policies. In the context of the NMC standards for education and training this includes students, educators, partner organisations, people who use services, carers, employers, other professionals, other regulators and education commissioners.

**Student:** any individual enrolled onto an NMC approved education programme whether full-time or less than full-time.

**Supernumerary:** students in practice or work placed learning must be supported to learn without being counted as part of the staffing required for safe and effective care in that setting. For apprentices, this includes practice placements within their place of employment; this does not apply when they are working in their substantive role.

Placements should enable students to learn to provide safe and effective care, not merely to observe; students can and should add real value to care. The contribution students make will increase over time as they gain proficiency and they will continue to benefit from ongoing guidance and feedback.

Once a student has demonstrated that they are proficient, they should be able to fulfil tasks without direct oversight. The level of supervision a student needs is based on the professional judgement of their supervisors, taking into account any associated risks and the students' knowledge, proficiency and confidence.

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# What we do

Our vision is safe, effective and kind nursing and midwifery practice that improves everyone's health and wellbeing. As the independent regulator of more than 771,000 nursing and midwifery professionals, we have an important role to play in making this a reality.

Our core role is to **regulate**. First, we promote high education and professional standards for nurses and midwives across the UK, and nursing associates in England. Second, we maintain the register of professionals eligible to practise. Third, we investigate concerns about nurses, midwives and nursing associates – something that affects a tiny minority of professionals each year. We believe in giving professionals the chance to address concerns, but we'll always take action when needed.

To regulate well, we support our professions and the public. We create resources and guidance that are useful throughout people's careers, helping them to deliver our standards in practice and address new challenges. We also support people involved in our investigations, and we're increasing our visibility so people feel engaged and empowered to shape our work.

Regulating and supporting our professions allows us to influence health and social care. We share intelligence from our regulatory activities and work with our partners to support workforce planning and sector-wide decision making. We use our voice to speak up for a healthy and inclusive working environment for our professions.



23 Portland Place,  
London W1B 1PZ  
+44 20 7637 7181

[www.nmc.org.uk](http://www.nmc.org.uk)

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